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Anti-Catholicism During the Election of 1960**

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"ONE DAY THERE WILL BE NO SUCH THING AS RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE": ANTI-CATHOLICISM
DURING THE ELECTION OF 1960

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the History

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“One Day There Will Be No Such Thing as Religious Intolerance”¹
Anti-Catholicism During the Election of 1960

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Honors Thesis in History
Fall 2019
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¹ John F. Kennedy Speech of Senator, Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Speech and Question and Answer, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX, September 12, 1960. Religious Issue, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25773>. Accessed October 2019.

On the evening of November 8, 1960, John Fitzgerald Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon in one of the tightest elections in United States history. In the months preceding this momentous election, many opponents expressed fears not only about the election of the youngest but also the first Catholic president. Just before the election, Bishop Everett W. Palmer of the First Methodist Church, called for his audience to put aside their religious prejudice and anti-Catholic fears for the greater good of the nation: “It is urgent for us to understand the plight of our Roman Catholic neighbors and be kindly.” However, the call came after an intense anti-Catholic sentiment had swept the nation during the campaign.² As a Roman Catholic campaigned for the presidency, many feared the implications this might hold. Why relatively late in the twentieth century were so many Americans concerned about the risks of a Catholic president?

The election of 1960 reflected a religious prejudice against Catholics that had followed America since its founding. There had been a long tradition of anti-Catholic sentiment within politics and popular culture, often aimed at issues such as federal funding of parochial schools or the papal influence on the U.S. government. These key issues followed from the influx of Catholic immigration of the nineteenth century to John F. Kennedy’s election. Kennedy’s election created an opportunity for the public paranoia about Catholicism and its implications for rising political attention as well as an opportunity to voice their fears. To Protestants, Kennedy demonstrated a real threat of Vatican violations of the establishment clause.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric began with the key foundational documents such as the U.S. Constitution. Many of the values in these documents reflected Protestant ideals such as the separation of church and state. Protestants saw “separation as a cornerstone of American

² Everett W. Palmer, “Some Issues Between Catholics and Protestants,” 22 September 1957 – October 16, 1960, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

freedom;” however, this cornerstone reflected the status in society that they held during this time period.³ Often values such as these over time became elements of U.S. culture and society due to the Protestant influence in early American history. Catholicism, in the minds of the Protestant leaders, demonstrated a true threat to the separation of church and state as seen in the public funding for parochial schools and religious authority within the federal government. Even though the founding fathers wrote for religious separation and tolerance, that tolerance had boundaries as seen in these various sublanguages that dictated republican ideologies. Within the writings, to combat the influence of “undesirable religions” certain sublanguages proved the distaste within American society.⁴ Anti-Catholicism became a prominent example of this due to the fear of arbitrary power and papal forces. Catholicism did not fall in line with the Protestant values placed in the nation’s founding. These Protestant values defaulted to become American values, which held the basis for early political thought and thus influenced the American people for centuries.⁵ These guiding principles often showed the actions of a moral person reflected in areas such as human nature and government.⁶ The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution demonstrated this through the Protestant ideals put forth which influenced various areas of American life.

Because of this foundation of Protestant values, it is not surprising that the strong Anti-Catholic sentiment flourished during the Irish immigration that picked up after 1815. In the conflict between Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Irish Catholics, strong allegiances developed in

³ Richard V. Pierard. 1983. “Standing the Founding Fathers on Their Heads.” *The Christian Century* 100 (12): 368–72. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000930806>.

⁴ Mark Noll 1993. “The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 23 (3): 615-638. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/206105>.

⁵ Prichard V. Pierard. 1983. “Standing the Founding Fathers on Their Heads.” *The Christian Century* 100 (12): 368–72. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000930806>.

⁶ Mark A. Noll. 1993. “The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 23 (3): 615-638. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/206105>.

the two sides that led to various stereotypes evolving.⁷ The emergence of a new generation of immigrants into the country brought to light the fears that had been inherited from America's founding. With the rise of this new population, the concept of anti-Catholicism grew as it centered around this new working class.

Who were these new people? Anti-Catholic Protestant proponents viewed them as an inferior ethnicity, who were "polluting the country, and did not have the intelligence or moral character to ever become positive or productive community members."⁸ Many Catholic immigrants arrived in the country with no true formal education or with only basic farming skills. When they started to migrate into the city, many established workers viewed them as lower class and as a threat to their way of life. Many Anti-Catholic sentiments such as the one above showed an attack on class status.

Originally, Anti-Catholicism began as a disdain of those of a lower class but grew into the fear of Vatican influence. The more outspoken of the Protestant population described the Catholic Church as "an institution they viewed as incompatible with republic principles."⁹ The allegiances that the Catholics held for a prominent figure in a foreign land seemed to contrast with the belief of the American republican government. This concept centered around the idea that Catholics would fall to the authority of the Pope in Vatican City, even above their central government. Vatican City and the religion contrasted the fundamental Protestant values for its reliance on an authoritarian government and forced religion.

As Irish Catholics sought refuge, the American public felt that the threat to their way of life was immediate, especially in their education system. Nativists insisted that public schools

⁷ Lawrence John McCaffrey. *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*. Revised ed. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

⁸ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

⁹ Ibid.

were necessary for the assimilation of immigrants and that parochial schools threatened American values.¹⁰ The school systems provided the opportunities for the education of the republican ideals that the American Protestants feared that Catholics would violate. Yet the Catholics responded to this concept by pushing reform for themselves, through a demand of state financing as a tool against the secularism.¹¹ To combat the anti-Catholic sentiment, Catholics lobbied for legislation changes and their candidates. However, the Catholic political momentum also brought forth a reactionary rise of anti-Catholic politicians. These politicians held platforms that fought against “popery” (Papal Influence) as well as parochial schools.¹²

One reason that these politicians could gain prominent standing stemmed from the support of nativist organizations such as the second Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, a prominent outspoken nativist organization during the 1920s, brought the anti-Catholicism notions from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The Klan’s new mission centered around “sacralizing the American nation and demonizing the Catholic Church” through various events.¹³ As the 1924 Immigration Act¹⁴ curtailed immigration, the Klan’s anti-Catholic bias gained momentum and the Klan took advantage of the aftereffects through escalated tactics.¹⁵ The Klan rose from this tension and tapped into the controversy that seemed to be growing. Their actions from burning crosses in the yards of known Catholics to the outwards resentments of Catholic candidates for

¹⁰John Lawrence McCaffrey *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*. Revised ed. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lynn S. Neal "Christianizing the Klan: Alma White, Branford Clarke, and the Art of Religious Intolerance." *Church History* 78, no. 2 (2009): 350-78.

¹⁴ The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins’ quota. Office of the Historian. “The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson–Reed Act).” *Office of the Historian*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

¹⁵ Lynn Dumenil "The Tribal Twenties: "Assimilated" Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (1991): 21-49.

public offices kept this religious intolerance alive throughout the beginning of the twentieth century fueling momentum into the 1960s election.

The Klan's actions focused primarily on forcing Christian fundamentalism on two religious issues within the schools: the use of Bible readings in schools and the eradication of Roman Catholic influences.¹⁶ According to the Klan, Catholicism poisoned the thoughts of children while turning them towards the Pope. Catholic teachings as viewed by nativist organizations became a tool towards allying themselves with the Pope. Many "feared the temporal power that Rome supposedly sought and wielded – the use of its loyal followers to erase the separation of church and state in a quest for national and world domination."¹⁷ The violations of such an esteemed clause in the United States' Constitution struck a chord in the minds of the public that would resonate for generations, especially in the upcoming election years.

Al Smith, a Roman Catholic and the 1928 Democratic candidate demonstrated an immediate threat to the Ku Klux Klan that forced them to fight for their values of Anglo-Protestant America¹⁸ The 1928 presidential election pitted the Republican Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover against the Democratic nominee, Governor Al Smith of New York. The competition proved competitive due to various controversial issues of the time such as Prohibition.¹⁹ Smith began to experience intense religious debate throughout the election for he refused to answer any questions about his religion, "holding that his beliefs were nobody's

¹⁶ Philip N. Racine "The Ku Klux Klan, Anti-Catholicism, and Atlanta's Board of Education, 1916-1927." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (1973): 63-75.

¹⁷ Lynn S. Neal "Christianizing the Klan: Alma White, Branford Clarke, and the Art of Religious Intolerance." *Church History* 78, no. 2 (2009): 350-78.

¹⁸ John Lawrence McCaffrey *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*. Revised ed. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

¹⁹ Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Elections, "1928 Presidential General Election Results," 2019, at <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1928>. Accessed November 2019.

business but his own.”²⁰ Smith believed that religion would have no place in the election and attempted to focus on policies. He stressed opposition to Prohibition, which many voters saw as a “symbol of the pride of immigrants and urban Americans.”²¹ Every policy that Smith tried to bring to light only furthered religious discussions that he continued to marginalize. Smith believed that any religious issue stemmed from bigotry and from that he wanted to avoid it but when it proved impossible, he wanted to deny the influence as much as possible.²² But he could not pull enough votes for a victory. Herbert Hoover defeated Al Smith by 444 electoral votes to Alfred Smith’s eight.²³ Even if the Smith campaign did not prove victorious, it created the first Catholic campaign with background context of combat of the Catholic issues.

The first Catholic Presidential candidate animated the fears that arose through the new immigration, which took hold of the 1928 election. By 1928 a new generation of Americans had grown up more accustomed to religious, ethnic, and cultural pluralism. Even with the melding of the new cultures, there were many still persecuted such as African Americans and Catholics, by nativist organizations. When a new candidate, who stood for all these disadvantaged populations, it seemed that a new light was rising across American history. “Al Smith embodied the incarnation of their [Jewish, African Americans and Catholics alike] own hope and pride; he is the man who had gone, as they would like but do not quite dare to go out into the great world to lift them from the secret sense of inferiority.”²⁴ To many immigrants and Catholics Al Smith

²⁰ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

²¹ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

²² Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

²³ Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Elections, “1928 Presidential General Election Results,” 2019, at <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1928>. Accessed November 2019.

²⁴ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

represented a knight in shining armor to fight off the oppressive majority through various political challenges to come.

The fear of an immediate violation of the Church and State arose in the context of Smith's campaign. Alabama Senator Thomas Hesflin spoke to the population by calling them to "guard your loins for political battle against Smith, lest the heavy hand of a Catholic state...crush the life out of Protestantism America."²⁵ Hesflin's words alluded to the fear that the Protestant values expressed in the foundation of the United States were under attack. Smith became a target of divided loyalty between American ideology and his Catholic faith, which threatened the individual liberty. The public began to wonder if a devoted Roman Catholic president could be capable of running a democracy.²⁶ Anti-Smith Protestants chose to capitalize on this by playing into the paranoia of Smith's allegiance. They spread around that "because the Church of Rome demands absolute allegiance in faith and morals, because it is virtually impossible to separate politics from questions of morals, Catholics could not be unswervingly loyal to American institutions."²⁷

After receiving a large amount of attention about his religious influence, Smith and his campaign team developed strategies that proved ineffective in his election. Originally, Smith believed that a large part of the religious issue stemmed from bigotry. He "sought to downplay and if possible, avoid it or dispatch the issue as quickly as possible."²⁸ His attempts to draw attention away from the issue, it only fanned the fire of anti-Catholic sentiment. "The persistence of the Catholic Question for Smith, and for Kennedy, thirty-three years later, had more to do

²⁵ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁶ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

with the perception of their audience than with any characteristics.”²⁹ The real issue within the election was not the religious beliefs of the candidate but rather how the audience perceived the religion.

Common issues about Anti-Catholicism throughout history have remained prevalent in the public eye. A common theme across these issues is the potential violation that would occur in the separation of church and state. The most prominent of these Catholic influences centered the belief of a Catholic’s unyielding loyalty to the Pope. The public remained fearful that a Catholic president would be torn in his allegiance between American values and the Catholic faith. A fear that would come out of this came in the form of parochial schools. Throughout history, people feared that Catholic schools would gain a strong power in the American system. The issues in education and papal influence remained large both in Smith’s election but loftier in Kennedy’s.

Smith’s statement of his faith in his country and final stance on his religion mirrored that of the Nicene Creed in hopes to reassure the public:

I believe in the worship of God according to the faith and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. I recognize no power in the institutions of my Church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the US or the enforcement of the law of the land. I believe in the absolute separation of church and state and in the strict enforcement..... I believe in the support of the public school as one of the cornerstones of American liberty.³⁰

Smith’s attempt to rid himself of the religious issue proved only to be a large hindrance that ended with his loss in the election.

The Election of 1960:

John F. Kennedy’s campaign proved successful in turning the “Catholic Issue” from a challenge to an advantage due to their candidate’s charisma, political record but most

²⁹ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

³⁰ Ibid.

importantly because of the ability to build off the failures that the Al Smith Campaign demonstrated. The Kennedy campaign sought to improve on the strategies of the previous Catholic election to gain public approval despite persistent Anti-Catholic sentiment of the time. Kennedy's campaign team says that the 1928 campaign of New York Governor Alfred E. Smith offered the Kennedy staff "little precedent for guidance in developing an appropriate strategy."³¹ Even though the strategies of Smith's campaign team could not provide the assistance that another Catholic candidate would encounter, it proved evidence of the anti-Catholic sentiment that can be traced throughout history through various key issues.

Many feared that Kennedy held loyalty to the Vatican government and that his bond to the United States would not hold up under Vatican influence. In the question of the separation of church and state, would the Church of Rome rule over the United States? The Catholic influence did not stop with the "popery," but also seemed to touch upon a fundamental quality of the United States, the education system. The confrontations of the two opposing forces could be viewed as "a battle of religious liberty against religious intolerance; true freedom against false freedom; real Americanism against bogus Americanism."³² The idea that parochial schools could provide the education of republican philosophies or that the Catholic president could stay unbiased was unthinkable, especially during the political elections of Catholic candidates.

As Al Smith campaigned in the wake of the nineteenth century with the Protestant nativist movement regarding immigration growing, John F. Kennedy faced a challenge in the revival of Christianity at the end of World War II due to its aftermath.³³ With this change in time

³¹ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

³² Lynn Dumenil "The Tribal Twenties: "Assimilated" Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (1991): 21-49.

³³ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

came the passage of an entire generation, one that had grown up in an area where nationalism ran rampant. World War II had supplied an opportunity for a large movement in nation-building. Anyone who lived within the United States regardless of religious affiliation became an American for it was all hands-on deck.

Nevertheless, when the war concluded, one would assume that when the strong nationalist tendencies cemented themselves into American culture, there would be no more religious intolerance. Anti-Catholic ideology rose its ugly head again. Protestant and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State organization (POAU) lawyer Paul B. Blanshard, described the criticism of Catholicism of the 1960's "as an ideological battle about public policy, not private religious faith: the new opposition [to the Catholic Church] is strongest among the liberals who have always stood most courageously for personal tolerance."³⁴ Kennedy's election expanded upon the notions of anti-Catholicism during Smith's election. The key issues that Smith experienced met the Kennedy campaign head-on, but Kennedy knew how to play to the strengths of the public with his charisma. Kennedy became the successful white knight of the disadvantaged, as well as an inspiration to those who had to overcome large obstacles in their private lives.

The situation involving the "Chapel of the Four Chaplains," proved to be one of the most cited religious incidents throughout Kennedy's term that sparked religious controversy. In 1947, after Kennedy's election into Congress, Dr. Daniel Polling, a prominent American clergyman, invited Kennedy to attend a dinner as a fundraiser for "an interfaith chapel in honor of the four chaplains who went down on the *Dorchester*."³⁵ Kennedy accepted the invitation, without

³⁴ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁵ The *Dorchester* was a US Army Troop ship that went down after the Germans fired three torpedoes off the coast of Greenland on February 3, 1943. NPR, "The Sinking of the *Dorchester*," May 28, 2001. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1123610> date accessed October 2019.

knowing it was not occurring in the chapel itself but rather in the basement of a church where a Catholic mass was never celebrated. Even though the fundraiser occurred in an area that did not coincide with the Catholic church, Kennedy still wanted to attend because he assumed, he was going in a public servant. But Polling had invited Kennedy to be the spokesperson for the Catholic faith.³⁶ Kennedy saw this as an affront to his position; he did not have the credentials to be a representative of his faith. He turned down the invitation when he learned of the truth for it seemed to compromise his integrity as an elected official. Kennedy expressed in a speech given when running for president that explained, “whether I as Senator or President I would attend a function (religious or not) if my public service is connected with my position.”³⁷ Whether it was a public or religious obligation the role of the public officials would take precedence to his religious obligations.

As the seasons of primary elections began in March of 1960, the early anxieties reflected those of the 1928 election. Catholics and non-Catholics alike feared that this election could revive all the horrible sentiments of an election in the not-so-distant past. Even avid Catholics feared that Kennedy’s campaign “might trigger a revival of nativism, and with it the defensiveness and insecurity of their people.”³⁸ The Catholic candidate continued to bring to life the anti-Catholic ideology to light through the press. Kennedy did not want his religion to be an obstacle in his election and wanted to prove to skeptical party leaders that the religious issue did not scare him.

³⁶ Pierre Salinger, Letter to Edward McGlinn, December 15, 1960, Salinger, Pierre Box, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/065/JFKPOF-065-004>. Accessed October 2019.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

The Wisconsin primary proved to be one of the more controversial primaries due to the amount of religious focus that occurred. The propagation of anti-Catholic sentiment can be seen through the local media in Wisconsin, which stressed how “bigotry” continued to rise through the distribution of various Protestant pamphlets.³⁹ Much of this propaganda centered around how the control of the Roman Catholic faith would influence the current Democratic candidate.

Kennedy’s campaign team saw these tactics as a prime example of how the Catholic vote could boost Kennedy’s support.⁴⁰ The rationale behind this support centered around Kennedy’s connection with the voters. The voters found him relatable due to the faith they shared; it strengthened the status they felt in American society.⁴¹ Since a Catholic had never before been considered acceptable enough by the dominant Protestant group to be sent to the White House.

Even with religious support, Kennedy did not want the election to focus on his Catholicism. The press continued to flog this issue while simultaneously ignoring the facts of the elections. Kennedy spoke of this in great detail, for when he detailed his plan for Wisconsin, “for example, on farm legislation, foreign policy, defense, and civil rights issues,”⁴² his positions did not hold the front page spots that his religion did. Yet, despite Kennedy’s annoyance about the

³⁹ Bob Siegrist. Letter to Senator John F. Kennedy, November 9, 1959, Religion Correspondence, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/assetviewer/archives/JFKCAMP1960/1049/JFKCAMP1960-1049-019>, Accessed October 2019.

⁴⁰ Gerard A. Brandmeyer. “Projection of the Issue of Religion Into the 1960 Presidential Campaign”, Received April 26, 1960. Catholic Issue Box, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/assetviewer/archives/JFKCAMP1960/1044/JFKCAMP1960-1044-015>, accessed October 2019.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² John F. Kennedy Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, “The Religion Issue in American Politics,” Washington D.C., April 21, 1960. Speech Files, 1953 – 1960, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0908/JFKSEN-0908-022>. Accessed October 2019.

lack of attention to his policies, Kennedy pulled ahead in the primary with 56.5 percent of the primary vote against Hubert H. Humphrey's 43.5 percent.⁴³

In the wake of various primary losses, Humphrey addressed Kennedy about his campaign's use of religion as an advantage. He warned that "Kennedy would not receive the same religious advantage in the next primary battle in West Virginia, where only 4 percent of the population was Catholic."⁴⁴ Humphrey stressed that the Kennedy campaign could not utilize the same tactics in West Virginia. Kennedy continued to deny that his faith would play that big of a role in his election, especially in the wake of the policies he hoped to bring to light in West Virginia. West Virginia would provide the challenge to the Catholic candidate that many skeptics predicted.

Politicians and the public alike played a key role in trying to sway people in the opposite direction. Local politicians used the primary as a chance to influence the public into thinking that Kennedy was too young and the United States was not ready for a Catholic in the White House.⁴⁵ Many Protestants believed that it was too soon to test the allegiance of Rome versus the loyalty to Washington. In a statement provided by a local, Victor J. Gabriel of Clarksburg, West Virginia, the reality behind the public perception of the Catholic issue surfaced; "the religious thing in the country here was not a factor, not an issue."⁴⁶ If it was not an issue in the local counties of West Virginia why did the campaign team have to continue to develop strategies to combat it? Kennedy believed that the religious issue came from the press, who continued to

⁴³ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Results of 1960 Presidential Election Primaries," <https://jfklibrary.org/learn> <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/results-of-1960-presidential-election-primaries>.

⁴⁴ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴⁵ William Young. "The John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Project, the West Virginia Democratic Presidential Primary, 1960," 1982, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

publicize religious articles rather than his positions on policy.⁴⁷ The press had continued to bring the issue to the forefront of voters' minds.

A mock poll was conducted in West Virginia and it showed Kennedy trailing by 20 points. Kennedy became tired of his constant attempts to discredit the issue; he decided the best thing to do was to address the anti-Catholic sentiment which had swept the state.⁴⁸ In a speech conducted in front of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Kennedy spoke of the "Religious Issue" to those who had fueled the fire.

There is only one legitimate question underlying all the rest of the press questions on my religion: would you, as President of the United States, be responsive in any way to ecclesiastical pressure or obligations of any kind that might in any fashion influence or interfere with your conduct of that office in the national interest? I have answered that question many times, my answer was and is NO.⁴⁹

Through Kennedy's acknowledgment, he had demonstrated how key the religious issue had played so far into the election. Kennedy followed similar remarks made by Smith in the denial of religious influence in his policies. The anti-Catholic sentiment that often transformed into the Anti-Kennedy ideology had swept the nation and threw the public in a conflict of the private and public spheres of the candidate's life. "I happen to believe I can serve my nation as President – and I also happen to have been born a Catholic."⁵⁰ An aspect of the candidate's private life became a large factor in his election into public office, often was framed as his fault.

Many people believed that Kennedy only made these speeches and declarations to gain public attention, much to Kennedy's dismay. Through this speech, Kennedy attempted to tell

⁴⁷ JFK Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Speech Files, 1953 – 1960, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0908/JFKSEN-0908-022>. Accessed October 2019.

⁴⁸ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Writers, "John F. Kennedy and Religion," <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/john-f-kennedy-and-religion>. Date Accessed October 2019.

⁴⁹ JFK Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Speech Files, 1953 – 1960, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0908/JFKSEN-0908-022>. Accessed October 2019.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

everyone about his dislike of such a subject. He did not want to become a symbol or a martyr for those who have felt oppressed for generations. Kennedy did not deliberately run for office to give a voice to the Catholic minority, also stating, “neither do I want anyone to support my candidacy merely to prove that this nation is not bigoted – and that a Catholic can be elected.”⁵¹

After reassurance that Kennedy did not seek publicity for his religious issue, he went on to explain the specific policy measures that worried the Protestant anti-Kennedy groups. Protestants believed that through the examples of a violation of the separation of church and state, Catholic influence was prevalent. “Federal assistance to parochial schools, for example, is a very legitimate issue actually before Congress. I am opposed to it; I believe it is clearly unconstitutional.”⁵² The federal aid to parochial schools became an issue during his time in the Senate, yet when it came to the vote, Kennedy adamantly opposed. Through this example, Kennedy had shown his allegiance to his country and his conscience in leaving his faith in his private life. Kennedy continued to demonstrate, despite relentless badgering by the press and Protestant groups, how he placed the country above his gain.

After the success following the speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Ted Sorenson, Kennedy’s head strategist, believed that Kennedy needed to confront which direction to take his campaign. One idea called for Kennedy to withdraw from the Presidential nomination and to accept the Vice-Presidential nomination. If he were to take this path, he would have “avoided a dangerous religious controversy” while simultaneously “placating the so-called Catholic vote.”⁵³ Kennedy responded to this discussion with anger for it treated “Catholics as a

⁵¹ JFK Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Speech Files, 1953 – 1960, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0908/JFKSEN-0908-022>. Accessed October 2019.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

pawn on the political chessboard.”⁵⁴ In doing this, a nation that had preached religious tolerance took a step back in time. Kennedy supports this in his statement: “Are we going to admit to the world that a Jew can be elected Mayor of Dublin, a Moslem can serve in the Israeli Parliament but a Catholic cannot be the President of the United States?”⁵⁵ How was it that the most powerful country in the world could have held such an old-world value?

Kennedy chose to distance himself from the idea of Vice-Presidency through his denial of implications of his candidacy as a symbol for the disadvantaged populations. He did not run for President to change the course of religious history. He proved that he could invoke strong political change in the areas of policy that truly count such as foreign policy, and civil rights despite his religion. “I am not the Catholic candidate for President; I do not speak for the Catholic Church on issue such as public policy. It had no claim over my conduct as a public official sworn to the public interest.”⁵⁶ After such large media coverage focused on West Virginia’s primary, Kennedy believed that he had finally put an end to the religious issue. At the beginning of May, the primary election in West Virginia came to an end with Kennedy gaining 60.8 percent of the vote and Humphrey 39.2 percent of the vote.⁵⁷ Following the primary, no Democrat publicly raised the issue and many West Virginians supported Kennedy because of his forthrightness.

Kennedy’s campaign team, head strategists Theodore Sorenson and Raphael Dungan did not believe such a pivotal issue could be over so easy. They produced key strategies to take with them to each of the primary locations. Their first suggestion was to create a “national statement

⁵⁴ JFK Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Speech Files, 1953 – 1960, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKSEN/0908/JFKSEN-0908-022>. Accessed October 2019.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

by prominent clergy deploring issues.”⁵⁸ This statement addressed to the various Protestant members to show validity behind Kennedy’s positions. The team also suggested the candidate attend various television shows, for Kennedy had a strong presence on camera, to answer questions in which 50 percent should be on religion.⁵⁹ They decided against another strategy but because of its similarities to the propaganda given by different anti-Catholic groups. They thought a strategy could be to “distribute brochure on religious issues, with materials from the same document, pictures of John F. Kennedy in uniform and with Protestant leaders.”⁶⁰ Often anti-Catholic groups used this tactic to spread their propaganda, so Kennedy’s campaign team sought to distance themselves from the opposition.

Through Kennedy’s implementations of these strategies as well as his speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Kennedy succeeded in gaining the approval of those within his party. In a correspondence written to the American Unitarian Association Kennedy wrote about his success in the religious issue, “my position, it seems to me, had been stated with sufficient precision so that my religious affiliations should not serve as a barrier to those who might wish to support the Democratic Party.”⁶¹ He thought he stated clearly and efficiently that Catholicism would play no role in his presidency. The skeptical party leaders believed in Kennedy’s ability to fight off the future prejudice they saw on the horizon but also in his policies for Kennedy secured the nomination on July 15, 1960, in Los Angeles, California.

⁵⁸ Theodore Sorensen. Memorandum, “The Religious ‘Issue’ In the Presidential Campaign.” undated. Theodore C. Sorensen Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/TCSPP>. Date Accessed October 2019.

⁵⁹ Theodore Sorensen and Ralph Dungan. “Memorandum,” April 18, 1960. Theodore C. Sorensen Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/TCSPP>. Date Accessed October 2019.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Dana McLean Greeley. Letter to John “Jack” F. Kennedy, July 15, 1960. Religious Issue File. John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKCAMP1960/1104/JFKCAMP1960-1104-030>. Date accessed October 2019.

Following his presidential nomination, Kennedy thought he had put the religious issue to bed, however, the press continued to badger him to make a statement. Dr. Glenn L. Archer, executive director of the group Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State called for “a Catholic candidate for President should answer a number of questions. Failure to do so would leave many Protestants ‘apprehensive.’”⁶² Finally, Kennedy conceded into commenting in an article written in Look Magazine, which would prove key to his campaign. As a new wave of religious tolerance grew, Kennedy realized that due to his status as the Democratic candidate he “must state clearly his views on the church-state issue.”⁶³

Whatever one’s religion in his private life may be for the officeholder, nothing takes precedence over his oath to uphold the Constitution and all its parts – including the First Amendment and the strict separation of church and state.....I am flatly opposed to appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican..... Following, the First Amendment to the Constitution is an infinitely wise one. There can be no question of Federal funds being used for support of parochial or private schools.⁶⁴

Kennedy demonstrated the pull that he felt toward the United States Constitution. His record of service and his continuous statement of his political leaning tried to ease the fears of the Protestant majority. Where the Protestants feared the stifling of their religious freedom, Kennedy went ahead to reassure that no such influence exists and had never existed. His belief in the separation of two spheres of life continued throughout his entire career, not only during his campaign as president. Even though proponents of anti-Catholic sentiment during the time stressed how the Catholic Church calls for the civil authority to use its ability to compel obedience, Kennedy repeatedly proved his distance from this perceived obedience.

⁶² Anonymous, “A Catholic Candidate Would Have to Give His Views on His Religion,” March 3, 1959, Look Article: Look Statement, 3 March 1959, at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKCAMP1960/1000/JFKCAMP1960-1000-002>, Date Accessed October 2019.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Through Kennedy's willingness to speak out on the religious issue, he deviated from the Al Smith election, which led to his victory. Where Smith decided to not address the role of religion in public speeches, Kennedy chose to capitalize on his ability to speak to the public clearly and concisely. In August, the Kennedy campaign team decided they should conduct a survey to gauge how the public perceived Kennedy in the wake of his various public appearances. The survey indicated that "Nixon led Kennedy 39.5 percent to 37.5 percent with 23 percent of the voters still undecided."⁶⁵ This survey affirmed fears that they have held since the West Virginian primary. The religion issue did not go away; the public still feared the loss of personal liberty. However, the campaign team decided to look at the religious issue as an advantage. His Catholicism could bring minority voters even though he would lose Protestant votes.⁶⁶ To pull the voters into Kennedy's side, he needed to make another speech. He had addressed at the state level with positive results; now it was time to address the nation.

On September 12, 1960, John F. Kennedy spoke to a group of Protestant Ministers finally bringing national light to the Catholic issue.⁶⁷ To the campaign team, this speech represented a key moment in the campaign; based on the rumors of anti-Catholic sentiment gaining power the risk was worth it. There was no alternative to directly addressing the religion issue before a potentially hostile Protestant audience. Yet, the speech went past the Protestant audience but also to the large Catholic population who "might be sensitive to any perception that he somehow might sell out his religion or church in the name of political expediency."⁶⁸ The speech provided the perfect avenue for which Kennedy turned the adversity he faced into a

⁶⁵ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "John F. Kennedy and Religion," <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/john-f-kennedy-and-religion>. Date Accessed October 2019.

⁶⁸ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

triumph as an element of his personality. It renewed momentum into his campaign by utilizing what he learned from Al Smith's lack of confrontation but still staying loyal to his country.

Kennedy embraced his Catholicism and argued that it was possible to be a president who happens to be Catholic as well as honor the American Constitution. Reverend Herbert Meza, the Vice President of the Association and the Program Chairman emphasized the need for the speech: "the fact that the senator is with us is to concede that a religious issue does exist."⁶⁹ Kennedy builds off of this baseline by attempting to connect this issue to the real ones throughout the election. He stressed that this should not be how he spends his time on the campaign trail. "There are not religious issues for war and hunger and ignorance and despair knowing no religious barriers."⁷⁰ Though this statement, Kennedy had added validity to the fears that have propagated the question, he is acknowledging that it is an issue and must be addressed while trying to marginalize the issue itself but simultaneously reassuring the public.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute. Where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference – and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him. I believe in an America that is neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish – where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source – where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.⁷¹

Kennedy outlined what he believed America is based on the Protestant values of the founding fathers. It was bigger than his faith and concerned about the lives of every American. In addressing these specific issues, he looked to combat all the distinct fears of violation of the

⁶⁹ John F. Kennedy Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX, September 12, 1960, Historic Speeches, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-the-greater-houston-ministerial-association>, Accessed October 2019.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

separation of church and state that the public's fears. This content looked to strongly influence the voter's perception of Kennedy's religion. It was the moment where Kennedy accepted the role religion had played in the election. No longer did he deny the press claims of religion as a factor in the campaign. Kennedy switched the negative religious factor into an advantage. Yet, even with his acknowledgment, he urged the public to look inside of themselves, past the religious prejudice that had influenced United States history for generations and look at Kennedy for his political views rather than his private beliefs.

I ask you tonight to follow in that tradition – to judge me on the basis of my record of 14 years in Congress – on my declared stands against an Ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools.... I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for President who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters – and the church does not speak for me.⁷²

Kennedy's address to the Houston Ministerial Association altered the course of the election, for he did what Al Smith refused to. He chose to express his true thoughts about the religious issue head-on both to prove his firm standing but as an attempt to confront the public. Many Protestant ministers reflected on this speech as the confirmation they sought, describing it as "the most complete, unequivocal and reassuring statement which could be expected of any person in his position."⁷³ Kennedy legitimized the role his religion would play in the election and used it to his advantage.

Following the speech, Kennedy allowed for a period of question and answers with the various ministers. These questions continued to stress Kennedy's perceived connection to the

⁷²JFK Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Historic Speeches, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-the-greater-houston-ministerial-association>, Accessed October 2019.

⁷³ Michael McConnell. "IS THERE STILL A "CATHOLIC QUESTION" IN AMERICA? REFLECTIONS ON JOHN F. KENNEDY'S SPEECH TO THE HOUSTON MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION." *The Notre Dame Law Review* 86, no. 4 (2011): 1635-1653.

Vatican as if the speech had not answered them enough. When asked if the Vatican had approved Kennedy's statement relative to the religious freedom as separated in the Constitution, Kennedy responded that he did not accept "the right of an ecclesiastical official to tell me what I should do in my sphere of public responsibility."⁷⁴ His statements were a matter of his own beliefs without Catholic influence, further strengthening the divide between the ant-Catholic values. "It seems to me that I am the one that is running for the office of the Presidency and not Cardinal Cushing and not anyone else."⁷⁵ The questions seemed to imply that Kennedy would become a puppet of an authoritarian head of another state no matter how many times Kennedy had denied this case.

If this election is decided on the basis that 40 million Americans lost their chance of being President on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loss, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history and in the eyes of our own people.⁷⁶

If the public allowed for Kennedy's faith to become the sole factor in the election, the country would have succumbed to the fears of the United States' founding fathers: religious intolerance. How is the US no better than those who publicly persecuted those of different faiths? As the election depended on the statements Kennedy had made about his faith, then the role of anti-Catholic sentiment influenced the scope of the election. Even after his address, Kennedy continued to have correspondence questioning his beliefs, thus his campaign continued to strategize how to combat such an issue.

While the Houston Address settled many fears for the Protestant ministers, it did not put the religious issue to bed. A prominent Jesuit priest who was one of the Catholic church's highest authorities on relations between the Church and State in the United States, Reverend

⁷⁴ JFK Speech of Senator, Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Speech and Question and Answer, Religious Issue, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25773>. Accessed October 2019.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Gustave Weigel, spoke out against the anti-Catholic fears in a New York Times article.⁷⁷ Within this article, Weigel explicitly legitimized Kennedy's claims that the Catholic church would have no authority in the United States. If Kennedy or any Catholic were elected President, they would make decisions without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. Even with such a distinct separation between Church and State, a religious candidate would be called to live what Weigel called "double life."⁷⁸ He addresses this key concept for the official "worshiped as he pleased in his private life, but in his public role 'he is a man of the law which is framed for practical purposes and canonizes no philosophy or theology.'⁷⁹ Kennedy would be forced to live with these distinct spheres, as a living example of the separation of church and state as reflected in Kennedy's own Houston Address. The concept of comforting the fears of the anti-Catholic supporters became a key component of Kennedy's campaign strategies.

Theodore Sorenson created a document considered the "Bailey Memorandum" that outlined the key elements in the fight against anti-Catholicism. This memo demonstrated the first religious-centered strategy within the general election campaign. The memo, named after the Connecticut Democratic Chairman John Bailey, explained that Catholics represented a large population in 14 states which could have a large electoral effect.⁸⁰ In an attempt to both deflect anti-Catholic sentiment as well as gain Catholic votes, Sorenson developed a plan that put forth Kennedy's positions. Various campaign interns assembled a fact book with various speeches, voting records, and statements from religious bodies. This book would placate the American

⁷⁷ Weigel is a professor at Woodstock College of ecclesiology (the study of social phenomena resulting from religious motive) John W. Finney, "Jesuit Rules Out Church Control Over a President." The New York Times, September 28, 1960, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

⁷⁸ John W. Finney, "Jesuit Rules Out Church Control Over a President," The New York Times, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Catholics by reciting their own beliefs in terms of the federal government while simultaneously combating the fears that anti-Catholic supporters propagated.⁸¹ This book, distributed to thousands of voters, represented the ability to combat the issues presented by the press but also maintained Kennedy's religious values. One section specifically dealt with the Position of the Roman Catholic Church within the United States, a subject hotly debated in the press. It said, "if tomorrow Catholics constructed a majority in our country, they would not seek a union of Church and State."⁸² Due to this statement by an apostolic delegate to the United States, Cardinal Francis Spellman proved that no Catholic would wish for a violation of the separation of church and state whether they were running for president or not.⁸³ With statements such as these, the campaign united Catholic voters in the restatement of their beliefs but denounced the claims made by anti-Catholic supporters in the press. Yet with this targeted election, the campaign team feared it would confirm the anti-Catholic notions.

When the concept was brought to the candidate, Kennedy gave the team two alternatives: "reviving the anti-Catholicism by nominating a Catholic or alienating Catholics by rejecting Kennedy's candidacy."⁸⁴ Either choice brought the religious issue to the forefront of the campaign. Sorenson believed that through the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, "Kennedy's personal appeal, hard work and political operation produced as they had in the past Kenney should win. Only the religion issue could defeat him."⁸⁵ There needed to be a strategy that could reassure and bring voters into the fold while simultaneously combating

⁸¹ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

⁸² Democratic National Committee. February – October 1960, Religion Issue, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed September 2019.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

the anti-Catholic sentiment. Sorenson decided the best way to handle it would have a specialized team, “Community Relations,” who had the mission: “one to reach out to Jewish voters and to neutralize the religious issue.”⁸⁶ When dealing with the religious issue, much of the duties of the team would call for responding to the flood of mail that came into the campaign on religious topics. Many of these respondents followed similar rhetoric:

The Senator had made his position unmistakably clear and thus had done everything possible to remove the religious issue from the current campaign. Certainly, his doing this affords no grounds for newspaper editors, radio, and television directors to continue to belabor the subject, thus distracting the electorate from the really relevant issues of the campaign.⁸⁷

This response supplied the perfect example of the implementation of Sorenson’s strategy to neutralize the religion issue. Through their appeal to the press to halt their production of religious articles, they looked to take the fire out of the flames of the anti-Catholic sentiment to spread to the public. Instead, the press would print the “real” issues of the campaign, a key goal of Sorenson’s religious campaign strategy.

Even Kennedy admitted the gamble that the Democratic party played in endorsing a candidate with such a controversial personal history, yet he remained optimistic.

The Democratic Party had once again placed its confidence in the American people, and in their ability to render a free, fair judgment – to uphold the Constitution and my Oath of Office - and to reject any kind of religious pressure or obligation that might directly or indirectly interfere with my conduct of the presidency in national interests.⁸⁸

Kennedy passionately believed that the Democratic Party would support him and the American people to look past such a private issue. The party compiled a variety of Kennedy’s quotes on

⁸⁶ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸⁷ J. Arthur Lazelle., Letter to Congressman Paul Rodgers, August 31, 1960. Catholic Issue, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKCAMP1960/1044/JFKCAMP1960-1044-015>. Accessed October 2019.

⁸⁸ Democratic National Committee. February – October 1960, Religion Issue, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed September 2019.

various issues and placed it into a document that outlined every fear that the press had written. Kennedy supporters distributed these comments amongst the various conventions and mailed to Democrats to try to marginalize the issue.

The support from the Democratic Party also came in the form of Kennedy's running mate, Lyndon B. Johnson. Because of Johnson's Texas origins, he became extremely valuable as the "Catholic Question" grew in the Lone Star State. His advisors had heard rumors of stirrings in the gossip from the Protestant leaders in the area.⁸⁹ When Johnson was questioned regarding his affiliation with the Catholic candidate, Johnson stood firm in his support and drafted a letter that he sent out to anyone who questioned. The letter detailed Johnson's opinion that religion should not be a part of the election but "cited Kennedy's heroism in defense of his country and that Kennedy had faced the religion question fully, frankly and courageously."⁹⁰ Johnson recognized the different religious compromises that Kennedy had to make in office and respected his ability to distinguish between what is good for the country rather than his allegiance to his faith.

Kennedy's beliefs faced a larger test in the few months up until the election. A scandal had broken out about Puerto Rican priests and their own country's election. In late October, three American-born Bishops issued a statement "forbidding Catholics from voting for Governor Luis Munoz Marin and his Popular Democratic Party."⁹¹ Marin and his Party strongly disagreed with the Catholic Church teachings on abortion and birth control, so the Catholic bishops sought to influence their candidates to stay loyal to the church. When this invasion of public policy broke

⁸⁹ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Michael McConnell. "IS THERE STILL A "CATHOLIC QUESTION" IN AMERICA? REFLECTIONS ON JOHN F. KENNEDY'S SPEECH TO THE HOUSTON MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION." *The Notre Dame Law Review* 86, no. 4 (2011): 1635-1653.

the news, the Kennedy campaign worried that the public would fear it could happen here. But Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Vatican's apostolic delegate to the United States, supplied a key save. He claimed that Bishops of the United States had never taken such a position nor would they in the future.⁹² His statement confirmed that an instance such as this could not happen in America.

As the Kennedy campaign continued to neutralize any religious issues, Sorenson discovered that the anti-Catholic sentiment was still gaining traction. Sorenson claimed in a meeting of the Community Relations team, that "over 300 different anti-Catholic tracts were distributed to over 20 million homes along with countless mailings, television, and radio broadcasts."⁹³ Where could this large amount of anti-Catholic sentiment come from?

On September 7, 1960, a conference was held amongst prominent Republican Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale, who established the National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom in Washington D.C.⁹⁴ Peale saw Kennedy as a threat to the liberty of the people, and it was his duty to gain support from the opposing party to stop Kennedy. Yet, due to Peale's close friendship with Nixon, the Democratic leadership continued to associate anti-Catholicism with the Republican party.⁹⁵ The Kennedy campaign proceeded to view the Republican opposition and Peale's organization as a strong factor in the anti-Catholic rhetoric in the public. In response to this growth, the Kennedy campaign actively pursued support from African Americans, Catholics, and religious minority voters in 1960.

⁹² Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Even among the tensions building between the Catholics and the Protestants, minority religious perspectives spoke out about their opinions in the context of the election. An article in the *New York Tribune* based out of Rosendale, New York, “The Jewish Vote” by Joseph Alop, provided a third-party perspective on “the religious question.”⁹⁶ However, in terms of the opinions of “the middle to an upper-income Jewish group,” it was not a matter of religion but rather political views. Mrs. Sandra Gold, a Rosendale dentist’s wife supplied a testimony that proved the opinion held by many Jewish citizens from Rosendale. “Let’s put it this way, I’m for Kennedy because I’m anti-Nixon and because I think Kennedy will at least use men like Adlai Stevenson and Chester Bowles.”⁹⁷ The issue had shifted towards the policies of the candidate, if one is not of either religious, the religious component is not the highest concern.

Adlai Stevenson, who was a member of the Unitarian faith, ran against Kennedy for the Democratic nomination for president as well as in the election in 1952 and 1956. After Kennedy won the election, he appointed Stevenson as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations.⁹⁸ Chester Bowles, who was also a Unitarian, played a prominent role on the platform committee for the Democratic National Convention during that year.⁹⁹ This example strengthened the belief that she believed Kennedy would be a stronger president for he was more likely to see the utility of other members of his party. Based on her identification as “Anti-Nixon,” she implied that she strongly disagreed with Nixon on many if not all accounts.¹⁰⁰ “

⁹⁶ Joseph Alop. “The Jewish Vote,” 22 September 1957 – 16 October 1960, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>, Accessed October 2019.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Wikipedia. “Adlai Stevenson II,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adlai_Stevenson_II#Family_and_religion.

⁹⁹ Wikipedia. “Chester Bowles,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chester_Bowles.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Alop. “The Jewish Vote,” News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>, Accessed October 2019.

When broached about the subject of Kennedy's religion, the general Jewish population at Rosendale did not see it as a primary concern. In the eyes of a housewife, who had observed the "Catholic issue," from a third-party perspective, religion was not the focal point of the campaign.¹⁰¹ Yet, even though she perceived Kennedy to be unhurt by his religion, she still believed some of the things the media had propagated. "He might be in cohorts with the Pope."¹⁰² The idea that she knew of these key issues proves how far the issue had come. Many Jewish people did not feel any concern, but some did recognize how Kennedy's religion may be a key influence in his presidency.

The idea of how influencing Kennedy's religion affected others such as Protestant denominations such as Lutherans proved important in the context of the election. In an entry of the *Chicago Daily News*, "Lutherans Pick Up, Drop a Political Firecracker," the importance of "the Catholics issue" in the media was greatly stressed. The opening line of the article states, "the candidate's religion may become the hottest election issue of 1960."¹⁰³ As the article began with this line, it provided the legitimacy of how far the issue had come in the public eye. Some parishes had even gone on to meet to discuss the implications of this issue within their own parishes. "The problem of the religious faith of candidates for public office was brought up at the 43rd annual meeting of the National Lutheran council."¹⁰⁴ Within this meeting of members, it was declared that Kennedy's religion would play a crucial role in his presidency. "The religious faith of a public officer undoubtedly influences the conduct of his public office to a certain degree."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Joseph Alop. "The Jewish Vote," News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>, Accessed October 2019.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Dave Meade, "Lutherans Pick Up, Drop a Political Firecracker," February 3, 1960, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

In giving a voice, especially in terms of a large meeting of high-ranking religious officials, the legitimacy of the issue of Kennedy's presidency continued to grow.

People were not ignorant of the anti-Catholic sentiment growing because of Kennedy's candidacy. Dr. F. Eppling Relnartz, the secretary of the United Lutheran Church felt that Protestants should prove their anti-Catholic message. He did not outwardly support Roman Catholics in fact, he believed that "a strong tendency of Roman Catholics to entrench themselves there and to gather power around themselves."¹⁰⁶ Outspoken advocates of this anti-Catholic movement fueled the fire to the public sentiment, as the presidency of the Catholic candidate grew closer.

Throughout the election, Kennedy gained strength by appealing to those who felt oppressed by the white Protestant Anglo-Saxon majority while Nixon had to navigate the religious issue uniquely. Kennedy's campaign strategies allowed for significant consequences, positive ones for their candidate but negative ones for Nixon. He believed that Kennedy had abused the Catholic issue which he then felt "justified later tolerance for 'dirty tricks' within his campaign team."¹⁰⁷

Richard Nixon's religious problem was the converse to Kennedy's during the election. His campaign team questioned how Nixon "could stave off a massive movement of Catholic Republicans to his opponent while simultaneously appealing to Protestants, all without appearing to be a religious bigot?"¹⁰⁸ Nixon had to appeal to the underlying anti-Catholic sentiment without

¹⁰⁶ Dave Meade, "Lutherans Pick Up, Drop a Political Firecracker," News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

looking as though he was a supporter. He often looked toward his former President at the time, Dwight D. Eisenhower for aid in how to marginalize Kennedy's religious issue.¹⁰⁹

Nixon reflected on the strategies used in the election during the fall of 1961 when writing his memoir, *Six Crises*. He held key beliefs that stirred the election in Kennedy's favor through the combatting of the anti-Catholic sentiment. He strongly believed that "Kennedy and his campaign team used religion to Kennedy's advantage," as seen through the various speeches centering the Catholic issue.¹¹⁰ Nixon himself took the opposite approach, one that conformed to the Protestant values in the US Constitution, where he would keep the religion out of his campaign.¹¹¹ Religious thoughts, as well as religious intolerance thought, had no place in an election that dealt with the public office. Where Nixon chose to distance himself from the religious issue, which ultimately hurt him and helped Kennedy win the election.

Based on Richard Nixon's theories behind the religious issue, his campaign team created a variety of different strategies to marginalize the "Catholic question." During an article in the *New York Times*, "Nixon Says GOP Enters Campaign as the Underdog," Nixon stated, "religion will be in this campaign to the extent that the candidates of either side talk about it. I shall never talk about it and we'll start right now."¹¹² In order to win the election, with a bar on the religious issue, Nixon wanted to target the large percentage of conservative white Southern voters who would not be moved with the Catholic rhetoric.¹¹³ He had to appeal to those whom Kennedy

¹⁰⁹ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹¹⁰ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹¹¹ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹¹² William M. Blair, "Nixon Says G.O.P. Enters Campaign as the Underdog," July 30, 1960. The New York Times. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, ProQuest, at <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/114936198/300596DF812445E6PQ/1?accountid=14663>. Accessed October 2019.

¹¹³ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

could not win over, but he also had to counterbalance Kennedy's momentum by appealing to the African American vote. He saw these voters a method of influencing others in his favor. He created a "Common Government Conference," where he and Martin Luther King Jr. were the keynote speakers. He hoped that by throwing his support behind such a prominent figure in the ongoing Civil Rights battle at the time and opening the conversation, he could win over a large part of the African American vote.

Even though Nixon had barred religion from campaign discussions, he knew he could not discount the role of Catholicism. He created his religious strategy to counter Kennedy's own "Community Relations." Nixon's strategy relied on a long-standing relationship with a Catholic priest, Father John Cronin to outreach to other Catholics. Cronin as a leading authority on Catholic teachings, he worked hard to "prevent a stampede to Kennedy, without being seen as an anti-Catholic bigot and instigator."¹¹⁴ Cronin was dealt with the difficult task of making Nixon appeal to the religious sects without contradicting Nixon's prior statements. The role of Cronin centered around the following: writing speeches, offering political advice, and creating relationships between Nixon and the Catholic Church.¹¹⁵

Cronin expressed many religious implications for Nixon's strategy that were too religious in nature. However, the *Christian Century* and organizations such as the Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State took the ideas and used them against Kennedy in earlier publications. Nixon was able to have the anti-Kennedy sentiment propagated while avoiding criticizing the Protestant opponents.¹¹⁶ He could not do any of it without the aid

¹¹⁴ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

of his valuable speechwriter and advisor Cronin. Cronin demonstrated the reach and power of the Catholic vote as well as reminding Nixon of the threat of Kennedy in the religious sense.

Cronin's fears of religious bloc voting came to fruition during the Wisconsin primary. The results of the primary proved a large push for Kennedy which would inversely show how many Protestants could come to Nixon's side, however, the issue came within the general election campaign. Robert Finch, Nixon's campaign director recalled the numbers as a large problem due to "Kennedy's ability to attract 'Crossover Catholic Republicans' who registered as Democrats to vote for Kennedy in that state's Democratic primary."¹¹⁷ It seemed to the Nixon campaign that religion became a key factor for the voters and would greatly influence the election.

The religious issue for the voters rather than the candidates called for aid outside of the Nixon campaign, specifically in different anti-Kennedy organizations. These organizations reflected the similar sentiment of the nativist groups that Al Smith had fought during the 1928 election. The groups of 1960 sought to "unite a variety of Protestant groups to pressure Protestants to vote against a Catholic."¹¹⁸ These different Protestant sections included the Citizens for Religious Freedom by the National Association for Evangelicals, Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention Revered W.O. Vaught of the Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Little Rock, as well as the Assemblies of God and the Revered Zimmerman.¹¹⁹ The key organization in this anti-Kennedy and the anti-Catholic sentiment was the Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU). This national organization had the sole focus of beating Kennedy due to his religious affiliations. Glenn Archer, the

¹¹⁷ Thomas J. Carty. 2004. *A Catholic In the White House?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Executive Director, proved that this fear of Catholicism held a large threat, “the Roman Catholic hierarchy had a box full of demands which violate our Constitution and give a special privilege to them alone.”¹²⁰

Near the end of the campaign, as Kennedy’s campaign kept up the momentum, Nixon hit a few speed bumps that ended his election chances. In another media appearance when asked on the aspect of religion, Nixon responded in saying “the only real and legitimate religious issue in an American political campaign would be or would arise if one of the candidates for the Presidency had no faith in God if he had no religion.”¹²¹ The requirement that one had to be religious, but it didn’t matter what denomination, seemed to matter greatly in Nixon’s mind. The public criticized him strongly for this seemed to contradict the notions displayed in this election. In response to the disrupted public, Nixon appealed to the press again by clarifying that “the Constitution, of course, does not apply and does not ask for or require any religious affiliation for any candidates for public office.”¹²² He needed to verify to the public that he was not in favor of a violation of Article IV in the United States Constitution.¹²³ Yet, even with this slip up the worst mistake was to come.

The downfall in the religious issue on Nixon came on the shoulders of E.X. James, the editor of the Baptist Standard.¹²⁴ In an interview with James, Kennedy reasserted his opposition to the public funding of parochial schools. This aspect of domestic policy proved to be

¹²⁰ Shaun A. Casey. 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹²¹ Richard Nixon, Transcript of the Remarks of the Vice President at the 17th Annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Dinner, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, NY Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, October 19, 1960, Richard Nixon, The American Presidency Project, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/274023>. Accessed October 2019.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Article VI forbids a religious test as a requirement for holding a governmental position.

¹²⁴ Shaun A. Casey 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

catastrophic to the Nixon campaign. Nixon, as a member of the Quaker religion, had often advocated for federal grants for sectarian colleges but the real blow came from his running mate Henry Cabot Lodge, who outwardly spoke of his support for federal aid to parochial schools.

There is, however, public responsibility for elementary and secondary education, a responsibility which under our Constitution rests with the United States. Therefore, any aid which the federal government wants to give in the field of elementary and secondary education should be given to the states. It will then be up to each state to decide whether federal funds given to each state should be used for both public and private schools.¹²⁵

Because of the statement by Lodge, all the Protestant and anti-Catholic critics were in the difficult position of seeing the Republican ticket embrace one of the policies that they thought Kennedy would support through his Catholicism. Kennedy had proven to stay committed to his stance on the separation of church and state, were Nixon allude to a potential violation in the forms of the federal funding of religious schools. Through this slip of policy, the Nixon campaign took a large hit in terms of polling numbers that led to silence about the religious issue on the Republican front.¹²⁶

The final time that Nixon broached the subject of religion in a national broadcast occurred the Sunday before the election. In this speech he had called for the voters not to “take his or Senator Kennedy’s faith into account.”¹²⁷ To the audience, it seemed to be a simple reminder to look at the candidates in terms of their policies rather than their private lives. The Kennedy campaign took this as “an unvarnished reminder to Protestants that Kennedy was a Catholic.”¹²⁸ The Nixon campaign used it as a final effort to pull away from the hazardous school issue.

¹²⁵ Shaun A. Casey 2009. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Kennedy's Catholicism became the most baffling issue of the campaign. It supplied an opportunity to capitalize on his faith rather than as a downfall, through their extensive strategies while, Nixon's failure to understand the issue led to Kennedy's victory. Many scholars have argued that Nixon and Lodge's blunder at the end of the election about an issue that had been key to the American public from the beginning of the nation proved determinantal. It was the final straw in the election.

John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon in the 1960 Presidential election by 84 electoral votes and by less than two-tenths of one percentage point in the national popular vote. The election was the closest popular vote margin of the twentieth century.¹²⁹ Kennedy's eventual victory in the election reflected a victory for the American Catholic population even if it was not his intention. His presidency would usher in a new wave of change that called for a push for religious tolerance. As Everett Palmer wrote following the election, "once [the Catholics] know our quarrel is not with them, their minds will be more open to the truth by which both we and they can be saved."¹³⁰ The time for religious prejudice had come and David had beaten Goliath.

The private and public spheres collided in Kennedy's campaign for his religious personal beliefs became a key factor within his election for public office. As written in an article in the Washington D.C. Tribune, the author explained how politics are complicated enough even without the public focuses on things that are not necessarily public policy.¹³¹ Even with all the public's fear of Catholic influence, Kennedy overcame a blend of his two spheres of life.

¹²⁹ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Results of 1960 Presidential Election Primaries," <https://jfklibrary.org/learn> <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/results-of-1960-presidential-election-primaries>.

¹³⁰ Everett W. Palmer, "Some Issues Between Catholics and Protestants," News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

¹³¹ James Beston, "Transfusion of New Blood in the Capital." Washington Post, August 14, 1960, News Clippings, 1960: February – October, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JWPP/001/JWPP-001-003>. Accessed October 2019.

Kennedy's campaign tactics and patience turned the "Catholic Issue" into an advantage which led to his historic victory. One could assume that religious intolerance could finally be over, and there could be no external threat to American Protestant values.

As generations of Americans were suspicious of the Roman Catholic Church's influence, more religious minorities would come under scrutiny throughout time. Early American history demonstrated an emphasis on the private life of candidates specifically religious views, but when faced with the prospect of a different president, Americans were not tolerant of Catholics in the 1960 election. This avenue of thinking continues today about those who practice Islam within America. In the election of Ilhan Omar in 2018 for the United States House of Representatives from Minnesota's fifth congressional district, she represents the challenge of public approval within the 21st century.¹³² For she is one of the first Muslim women elected to serve in the United States House of Representatives, she similar to Kennedy became the target of much prejudice thought and actions since taking office.

When Democrats in the House sought "to change a rule banning headwear on the floor of the House accommodate incoming Muslim lawmakers."¹³³ Even though this law supported those elected beyond the Anglo-Protestant perspective, it became the target for another round of religious intolerance. In following the law, E.W. Jackson, *The Awakening* radio host, propagated an episode complaining about Muslims taking over Congress.¹³⁴ One of the various anti-Islamic quotes stressed the theme of fear of the other similar to the anti-Catholic proponents during

¹³² Associated Press. 2019. *The New York Times* . January 28. Accessed November 20, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/minnesota-house-district-5>

¹³³ Beachum, Lateshia. 2019. *The Washington Post*. November 19. Accessed November 20, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/11/19/islamophobic-trump-supporter-who-threatened-kill-rep-ilhan-omar-pleads-guilty/>.

¹³⁴ Daugherty, Owen. 2018. *The Hill* . December 6. Accessed November 20, 2019. <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/420061-conservative-pastor-the-floor-of-congress-is-now-going-to-look-like-an-islamic>.

Kennedy's election, "the threat to humanity is not merely radical Islam. The threat to humanity is Islam, period."¹³⁵ The fear of the other presented in this tirade demonstrated how religious intolerance did not end when Kennedy was elected. However, where Kennedy did not believe his election represented a step towards religious tolerance, Omar called her election "a rejection of religious bigotry."¹³⁶ Religious intolerance occurs even to this day for, many similar incidences of religious intolerance have been present throughout Omar's term. Kennedy's election reflected great strides to overcome such a fear, it did not end there.

Idealists hope that the issue of religious intolerance would fall behind but the core problem of fear in the exploitation of religious ideologies continues today. Patience for "first candidates" becomes more than virtue but a necessity.¹³⁷ A first candidate is one that is the first of a specific characteristic, as Kennedy was the first Catholic President. First Candidates must know how to be patient over many campaigns and years in the hope to inspire change for the future. In his Houston Address, Kennedy demonstrates this aspect: "Today, I may be the victim – but tomorrow it may be you – until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril."¹³⁸ If our religious intolerance as a society does not cease the negative sentiments will continue to grow ultimately challenging the values that are distinctly American.

¹³⁵ Daugherty, Owen. 2018. *The Hill*. December 6. Accessed November 20, 2019. <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/420061-conservative-pastor-the-floor-of-congress-is-now-going-to-look-like-an-islamic>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Michael J. Hostetler. "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign." *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1998): 12-24.

¹³⁸ JFK Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Historic Speeches, John F. Kennedy Library Digital Collections; at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-the-greater-houston-ministerial-association>, Accessed October 2019.

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